

VZCZCXRO1338

PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO

DE RUEHKO #4453/01 2200925

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 080925Z AUG 06 ZDK CTG UR SVC #0066W 2280035

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5137

INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3661

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1177

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 9798

RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 7572

RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 0886

RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 8686

RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 0344

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

RHMFIISS/COMUSKOREA SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

RHMFIISS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY

RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 004453

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y //ADDED CLASSBY STATEMENT//////////

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KS JA

SUBJECT: THE "COLLAPSE OF TRUST" IN JAPAN - ROK RELATIONS

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CLASSIFIED BY POL OFFICER KEITH JORDAN REASON 1.4 (d) (g)

¶1. (C) Summary. Japan-ROK relations presently suffer from a &collapse of trust,⁸ according to Prof. Masao Okonogi, a leading Japanese expert on Korea. Upcoming elections for prime minister of Japan and for president of the ROK will impact the future course of the bilateral relationship, Okonogi believes. Okonogi asserts that ROK President Roh has surrounded himself with anti-U.S. and anti-Japan advisers. Okonogi opined that Abe's close relationship with abductee family support groups would create a higher &hurdle⁸ in Japan-DPRK relations. This downbeat assessment mirrors an annual ROK-Japan mirror poll showing public perception of bilateral relations at an all-time low. End Summary.

Japan-ROK Relations

¶2. (C) In a July 27 conversation with Embassy Tokyo political officers, Korea expert Masao Okonogi, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Keio University, described current Japan-ROK relations as characterized by a &collapse of trust⁸ between top-level officials. Though government-to-government relations are at a low point, people-to-people contacts remain good, with thousands of visitors and billions of dollars in trade exchanged between the two countries. Okonogi cited the need for the leaders to take steps to restore trust as a way of improving the bilateral relationship.

¶3. (C) Three upcoming elections in Japan and the ROK would affect the future course of bilateral relations: a) the LDP presidential election in September 2006, (b) Japan's Upper House election in July 2007, and c) the ROK presidential election in December 2007, Okonogi related. Although Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe's anticipated election as prime minister would not immediately affect Japan-ROK relations, Okonogi suggested that Abe is a realist capable of dealing in a pragmatic way with the ROK.

¶4. (C) Echoing comments made by other analysts of

Korea-Japan relations, Okonogi observed that communication between mid- and senior-level Japanese and ROK parliamentarians, which had once been quite strong, had all but disappeared. There appeared to be little incentive for today's politicians to rebuild them. The current ROK administration, with a considerable number of what Okonogi described as &leftist nationalists⁸ has little interest in developing close relations with Japan's conservative politicians. Japan-ROK political interchange will only come with a shift in power back to the right in South Korea, Okonogi stated.

¶15. (C) According to Okonogi, ROK President Roh has surrounded himself with advisers who are anti-U.S. and anti-Japan nationalists. As students, these advisors battled to achieve democratic reforms against a ROK government and military firmly backed by the United States and Japan and had equated demonstrations against the government, in a sense, as protests against the U.S. and Japan. Okonogi believed that ROK presidential candidate Park Geun-hye, daughter of former ROK President Park Chung-hee, if elected, might work to improve relations with Japan. He concluded that most Japanese were likely to find her brand of nationalist ideology more acceptable.

Yasukuni

¶16. (C) Although Koizumi and Abe both visit Yasukuni Shrine, Okonogi viewed Abe's visits as "ideological⁸ in nature, unlike those of Koizumi. &Abe is cautious about history while Koizumi isn't,⁸ he stated. Koizumi and Abe's different approaches are reflected by the fact that Koizumi has referred to &war criminals,⁸ while Abe has never used that phrase. Okonogi thought that Abe, should he become prime minister, would decide against visiting Yasukuni Shrine on August 15. The recently released memorandum from an aide to Emperor Hirohito - which revealed that the former emperor stopped visiting Yasukuni Shrine because Class-A war

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CLASSIFIED BY POL OFFICER KEITH JORDAN REASON 1.4 (d) (g)

criminals were enshrined there - would help Abe deflect some criticism. However, many of Abe's conservative supporters would still be disappointed.

Japan-DPRK Relations

¶17. (C) Abe and PM Koizumi also differ in their stances towards relations with DPRK, according to Okonogi. &Despite U.S. opposition,⁸ Koizumi visited Pyongyang twice in an effort to normalize diplomatic relations. &In this light, the distance from Koizumi to Kim Jong-Il is slightly narrower than that from Abe,⁸ he said. Abe has expressed strong support for the families of Japanese abducted by DPRK) a factor that has boosted Abe's popularity. According to Okonogi, Koizumi rarely met with the abductee families. Okonogi predicted that Abe's close relationship with abductee families would make the "hurdle" in Japan-DPRK relations even higher. Okonogi expressed concern about Japan's recent attempt to incorporate Chapter VII provisions into a UN resolution against North Korea, asserting that Japan's constitutional prohibition against military action prevented enforcement by Japan. The adoption of UNSC 1695 was a better result, he suggested.

DPRK Succession and Power

¶18. (C) Echoing a view held by some DPRK watchers, Okonogi stated that Kim Jong Il's eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, would not likely succeed him. Kim's other sons, Kim Jong-chol and Kim Joun-un, were too young. The succession issue is a critical factor in terms of the future of the DPRK and could easily

trigger its collapse. Okonogi thought it might take another decade for a next leader to be appointed. He played down any suggestion that Kim Jong-il was forced to balance competing factions within the DPRK. Although the DPRK began as a Stalinist regime with the Worker's Party of Korea (KPW) in control, the regime later adopted the characteristics of a sultanate,⁸ he explained. The DPRK subsequently became an emperor system,⁸ meshing well with traditional Korean society, even as it evolved into the present military-dominated regime. The military is now, in effect, the government, Okonogi asserted; it is clearly in control. He suggested that distinct factions had earlier vied for power, with the WPK being first among equals.⁸ Now, the National Defense Commission, created by Kim Jong-il after 1998 drawing on lessons learned from Russia's failed coup, is clearly at the top of the power structure.

Comment

¶ 9. (C) Last November, Prof. Okonogi, a well-regarded Korea expert and long-time Embassy contact, gave an interview in which he offered a decidedly upbeat view of the future of Japan-ROK relations. We therefore find his current pessimistic assessment, 10 months later, to be a telling indicator of how far the relationship has sunk. His assessment was confirmed in a public opinion poll conducted in late June and early July by Yomiuri Shimbun and Seoul's Hankook Ilbo and released August 7. The survey found that only 36% of those asked believed Japan-ROK relations were in good shape -- down 24 points from last year's survey. A total of 59% thought relations were in bad shape -- up an equal 24 points over the same period. Pollsters reported that these were the most negative numbers since the survey began in 1995. Interlocutors in Tokyo, including in the ROK Embassy here, are not optimistic that relations will improve in the near term, in light of the domestic political factors at play in both nations.

SCHIEFFER